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ABSTRACT

This paper presents data on the Parent Education model of Project Follow Through as one example of the impact of Follow Through on education in the home and school. It is reported that data from ten communities in nine different states indicate a consistent impact in two areas: (1) the home-school partnership and parental teaching behaviors, and (2) the school, the community, and the career development of parents, paraprofessionals and professionals. For the first area, the data presented include descriptive statistics on parent involvement in six roles (teacher of own child, paraprofessional, decision maker, learner, audience, and classroom volunteer), and results of small scale studies of the differences between program and comparison families regarding program-stressed teaching behaviors and their relationship to child achievement. The program's impact in the second area is being measured through ethnographic case studies which cover all six roles of parent involvement. Preliminary findings from these studies are reported. It is noted that the national evaluation of Follow Through neglects the area of parent involvement, and it is recommended that future evaluations of comprehensive approaches to education should include analyses of parent involvement and broader studies of educational/social change models. (Author/CM)

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Continuity between Home and School:

Aspects of Parental Involvement in Follow Through

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Continuity between Home and School:
Aspects of Parental Involvement in Follow Through

A special characteristic of the Follow Through program is the federal requirement for extensive parental involvement. Federal regulations state that parents shall be involved in policy making and in various ways which not only influence the program but also enhance their own development. One conceptualization of this is to see parents as: teachers of their own children; paid paraprofessionals; decision makers and policy advisors through Policy Advisory Councils; adult learners of new skills; recipients of information; and as volunteers in the classroom (see Figure 1) (Gordon, 1970; Gordon & Breivogel, 1976).

Although the role of parents is stressed in the regulations, the national longitudinal evaluation neglects this area, and the model sponsors vary in their interest and involvement in this aspect of the Follow Through program. Several of the models focus on the home-school partnership as their main intervention strategy. The largest of these is the Parent Education model.

This paper presents data on the Parent Education model as one example of the impact of Follow Through on education in the home and school. These data relate to the parental roles that were previously mentioned.

The data on ten communities in nine different states indicate a consistent impact in the areas of: first, the home-school partnership and parental teaching behaviors; and second, the school, the community, and the career development of parents, paraprofessionals and professionals.

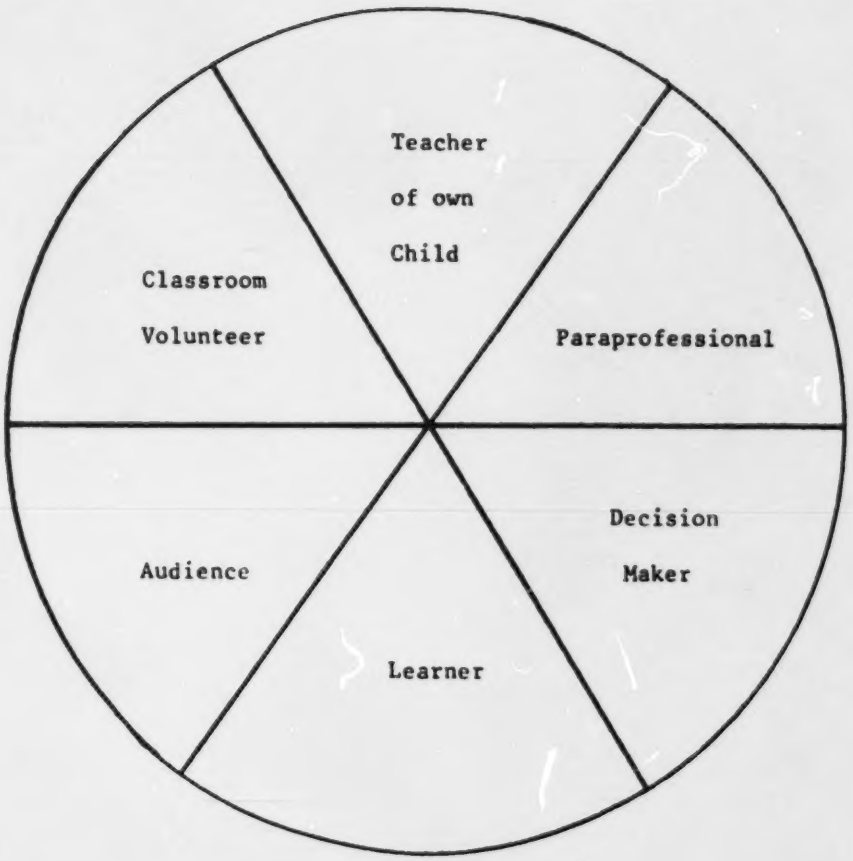

Figure 1. Parental roles in parent involvement.

Impact Upon the Home-School Partnership and Parental Teaching Behaviors

The first category of data focuses upon the home-school partnership and upon parental teaching behaviors. This category addresses the six roles of parental involvement.

Parental Roles: Teacher of Own Child and Paraprofessional

The key role of parental involvement in our program is that of teaching one's own child. The main vehicle by which this role is carried out is through the home visitation component of our model. This component also includes the role of the parent as a paid paraprofessional. In our program, paraprofessionals visit the homes of our children as well as work with these children and their teachers in their respective classrooms. These home visits distinguish our program from other Follow Through programs which emphasize the classroom more than the home. By visiting a child's home and working in the classroom, the paraprofessional helps to develop the partnership between the home and the school. Moreover, it is during this visit that the paraprofessional helps the parent become a teacher of his or her own child. Table 1 presents the data concerning the percentage of families receiving home visits in our program. The schedule of these visits varies from community to community. Typically, most of our communities require one home visit per week for each child. In one of our communities, 98% of all Follow Through families received at least 80% of their scheduled home visits during 1977. To place this in perspective, over 6,000 families were in the program in 1977, and a total of 153,567 home visits were made (Gordon, 1978).

Table 1

Parental Involvement Data:

Percentages of Families Receiving Completed Home Visits[a]

1974 - 1977

Year	Highest Community	Lowest Community	Median Community
1974	49	8	23
1975	81	22	58
1976	83	11	66
1977	98	55	90

[a]These percentages reflect those families receiving greater than 80% of the scheduled home visits.

Other data which deal with the role of parents teaching their own children focus upon this teaching behavior as it relates to child achievement and to a phenomenon we have labelled as vertical diffusion.

Parental teaching behavior and child achievement. Parents were videotaped while teaching their children a standard task. Using one set of parents who had been in the Parent Education Model for at least one year (Follow Through) and another set of comparable parents who had never been in the Parent Education Model (non Follow Through), these videotapes were scored for the number of Desirable Teaching Behaviors (DTBs) used. These desirable teaching behaviors are stressed during the weekly home visits in conjunction with home learning activities. The results indicated that Follow Through parents used an average of 24.0 DTBs while the non Follow Through parents used only an average of 14.5 DTBs. This difference was statistically significant ($F = 6.35$, 1 & 63 df, $p < .05$), leading one to conclude that for this sample, participation in the Parent Education Model may have increased the parent's use of the DTBs. Further evidence suggested a relationship between the number of DTBs used by the parent and the performance of the child on the Total Reading and Total Mathematics subtests of the Stanford Achievement Test. The results indicated that the number of DTBs used by the parent correlated both with Reading ($r = .50$, $p < .001$) and with Math ($r = .35$, $p < .05$) (Olmsted, 1977).

Vertical diffusion. Vertical diffusion refers to the phenomenon by which members of the family other than the target child are affected by the program. If our program modifies parental teaching style, then the parents may apply these new skills with younger children. As a result, the younger

siblings from Follow Through homes may come to school better prepared than younger siblings coming from homes not previously included in Follow Through. This notion has been researched in two studies, and, in both, it was found that children coming from Follow Through homes scored higher on the Preschool Inventory than did comparable children coming from non Follow Through homes. Furthermore, the results seemed to suggest that it takes about two years of parent participation before an impact occurs (Ware, Organ, Olmsted, & Moreno, 1974; Moreno, 1974).

Parental Roles: Decision Maker, Adult Learner, and Audience

Three other parental roles are related to a component of our model which stresses parental participation at Policy Advisory Council (PAC) meetings and activities (see Tables 2 and 3). These three roles are decision maker, adult learner, and audience.

Table 2 presents data concerning decisions made by parents at PAC meetings. Examples of these decisions address topics such as: determining the criterion for the selection of paraprofessionals; writing proposals; and gathering information for presentation in Washington, D.C. to support the future funding of the program. In one of our communities, a grand total of 376 decisions were made at 66 different meetings during 1977.

Table 3 presents data concerning parent attendance at various PAC meetings which focus upon topics such as hiring of personnel, proposal writing, and reviewing actions taken by parents to support the future funding of the program (see Table 3). Attendance at these meetings has remained consistently high over a four year period.

Table 2

Number of Decisions Made

at Policy Advisory Council Meetings

1976 - 1977

Year	Highest Community	Lowest Community	Median Community
1976			
Decisions	235	7	25
Meetings[a]	138	9	8
1977			
Decisions	376	46	107
Meetings[a]	66	20	13

[a]The numbers indicate the number of meetings at which these decisions were made.

Table 3

Parental Involvement Data:

Percentages of Parents Who Attend Policy Advisory

Council Meetings and Activities

1974 - 1977

Year	Highest Community	Lowest Community	Median Community
	Meetings		
1974	59	9	27
1975	57	14	28
1976	55	18	34
1977	53	13	33
	Activities		
1974	27	7	15
1975	31	4	22
1976	44	14	26
1977	62	11	27

In addition to these parent meetings, parents have attended such PAC activity functions as Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) classes and banquets honoring active parents in the program. The parental roles demonstrated at these GED classes and banquets are those of an adult learner and audience, respectively. As one will observe in Table 3, attendance at these and other activities has steadily increased over a four year period. The median percentage of families attending activity functions at least one time across all communities has increased from 15% in 1974 to 27% in 1977.

These findings are impressive in that they show the high level of involvement at PAC meetings and activities at which parents make decisions regarding their children, the Follow Through program, the community, and the school system.

Parental Role: Classroom Volunteer

The data dealing with the role of parents as volunteers in the classroom is reflected in Table 4. The percentage of parents who have volunteered in the classroom at least once has increased from 1974 to 1977. These high percentages indicate the active involvement on the part of parents when participating in classroom activities such as teaching, keeping records, evaluating, and developing materials.

Impact upon the School, Community, and Career Development of Parents

The second major category of data includes ethnographic case studies currently underway which focus on the program's impact upon the school and community, and upon the career development of parents, paraprofessionals and professionals in seven of the model's participating sites. This category covers all six roles of parent involvement.

Table 4

Parental Involvement Data:

Percentages of Parents Who Volunteered in the Classroom

1974 - 1977

Year	Highest Community	Lowest Community	Median Community
1974	58	19	42
1975	70	29	45
1976	96	27	42
1977	84	28	55

Parental Roles: Teacher of Own Child, Paraprofessional, Decision Maker, Adult Learner, Audience, and Classroom Volunteer

The data-gathering techniques being used in these case studies include focused and nondirective interviewing at project sites, structured observations at the sites, and examination of longitudinal files for unsynthesized information.

Preliminary findings from the first set of sites indicate impact in the area of career development for low income persons in paraprofessional and nonprofessional positions. By providing jobs and training for low income persons, the program has helped poor families become self-sufficient. This has occurred in many programs, not just Follow Through, and in all our communities. Yet, Follow Through's impact is noteworthy.

For instance, data from Houston, Texas give some indication of the influence that being a paraprofessional home visitor has had on careers. Fifty-five of sixty-one parent educators in Houston have raised their level of education. Thirty-nine indicate this was acquired through the program, eight did it on their own, and four used both personal and Follow Through resources. At entry into the work, six had more than high school (including GED); now forty-two have post-high school training.

The model has also influenced the development of diverse programs. Findings from the Yakima, Washington site include spin-offs throughout the school system and community, such as:

1. Home Base program for ages 0-3, now nationally validated by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) and part of the National Diffusion Network, with adoptions in 20 communities.
2. Backyard Center program of playgroups, with parent education as a focus for middle-class parents.

3. Guide teacher programs in the junior and senior high school where each 7th and 10th grader is assigned a teacher who volunteers to make periodic home visits.
4. Modification of the hospital pre-natal program so that 1/5 of sessions are on parenting, with follow up at baby's age 6 and 10 weeks.
5. Program for Deaf, which works with parents in the home.
6. Modification of Titles III, IV and I programs on the Follow Through model.
7. Two weekly columns in the Yakima Daily Sun, written by Follow Through staff, one on discussion of home activities and teaching behaviors, the other on home-school partnership.

Similarly, in Richmond, Virginia, parents have initiated programs adapting components of the parent education model to local needs. Included are:

1. A day care center within an elementary school where pre-school children are kept while their mothers volunteer in the classroom (mothers take turns volunteering in the classroom and caring for the children in the Discovery Room);
2. A pre-school center for youngsters unable to get into Head Start programs which were filled. Program operates for two to three hours daily and the children are taught by their parents; and
3. Parent Centers in non-Follow Through schools.

Political spin-offs of the model are evident in various sites. For example, in Hillsborough County, Florida, a woman who had served as a Follow Through PAC chairperson entered the election for school board members.

Although she did not win, she made a strong showing in the final results. The impact of this event on other Follow Through parents is as important as the event itself. Many parents registered to vote and voted for the first time in a school board election. Parents became aware of the educational issues and of the positions of the various candidates. Finally, Follow Through parents became more aware of the role and function of the school board as it relates to the schools in general and to Follow Through in particular. They are active in interactions with the County Commission as well as the school board.

Another site where the model has had political impact is Fairfield County, South Carolina, where Follow Through has facilitated communication and a sharing of power. As a researcher in the community described it, blacks have made significant progress in finding inroads into policy making bodies where they were systematically excluded a decade ago. For example, blacks hold two of the five county council seats and four of the nine board of education seats. The researcher states that it is reasonable to conclude that Follow Through has served a function analogous to that of the "honey bee" in the cross-pollination process. This is supported by comments made by people in Fairfield County. Follow Through promoted parent involvement in the schools in particular and in the community in general. Through involvement, parents developed skills and confidence that encouraged greater participation in the affairs of the community. The elected and appointed officials are sensitive to the needs and concerns of Follow Through parents which is suggestive of their political clout.

Furthermore, preliminary findings suggest the model's impact in fostering the delivery of medical, dental, social, and psychological services to

low income families. This has involved the integration and coordination of services by community agencies and regular school personnel. The coordinated efforts have helped parents become more informed consumers of services and more effective advocates for improved delivery (Gordon, 1978).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data that were presented related to our conceptualization of the six roles in parent involvement. These data were also shown to demonstrate the successful impact that this program has had upon the parents, children, school, school system, and the community. It should be noted, however, that these are the types of data which have been overlooked in policy making at the federal level. In our opinion, if federal guidelines require parental involvement, then evaluations of these guidelines should be required. Furthermore, if funding were to be continued for the sponsors as external agents in Project Follow Through, then the evaluation of the program should include the analyses of sponsor specific goals. Several of these specific goals are amenable to the types of data analyses presented in this paper. To recapitulate, based upon our experiences regarding the use of these different evaluation approaches, it is our recommendation that future evaluative efforts, which focus upon comprehensive approaches to education, should include analyses of parent involvement and should incorporate broader scale evaluations of educational/social change models.

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